

Cool Tools



by Karen J. Klapperstuck and Robert J. Lackie

We live in a Web 2.0 world where everyone is capable of creating content and sharing it, not just accessing what someone else has created and shared. Tools to create content are now readily and freely (or somewhat inexpensively) available to the general population. No fancy equipment is necessary other than access to a computer. In the words of David Hornik, these tools “democratize the content business. They empower the average Internet user to become a content creator and publisher rather than merely a consumer of professionally created music, video, etc.”

Content creation tools can aid in instruction and teaching, providing another avenue for students to access and learn the material. “More and more teachers and schools are starting to experiment with the technology as a way to communicate with students and parents, archive and publish student work, learn with far-flung collaborators, and ‘manage’ the knowledge that members of the school community create,” said Will Richardson in a 2004 *MMIS* article. You can involve the students, cre-

ating a space where they can be heard. These tools really can help make learning more fun and interactive.

We’ve divided the resources among a few categories. Some are free and others fee-based, but all are customizable to suit your individual purposes and needs. Our article focuses on individual content creation programs as well as two suites of products, with some honorable mentions and two relevant content sharing/organization sites. We did not include blog or wiki software because so many recent publications have focused on those Web 2.0 technologies. Instead, we wanted to look at ways to enhance blogs, wikis, and other course content sites. A table containing the title of the tool/resource, the website, the platform for use, and the cost has been included.

PODCASTS AND SCREENCASTS:

Podcasts (audio broadcasts formatted for playback on a digital music player and distributed via the web) can be used in classroom settings for a variety of purposes.

for Content Creation

More Than
Blogs or Wikis



One idea is to invite an author or other field expert to create a podcast to share ideas or to do an interview. You could also use podcasts to record students' presentations to help them improve their speaking skills. A few tools for creating podcasts and editing audio files follow:

- Audacity (free; cross-platform) is a free audio editor and recorder. It is a cross-platform, open source tool. With Audacity, you can easily play with pitch and fade volume, remove background noise from a file, and add neat effects, such as echo or wahwah. It also automatically converts tracks with different sample rates or formats in real time.
- Audio Hijack Pro (fee-based; Mac only) from Rogue Amoeba is a cool way to record audio files. You can use this software to record any sound your computer makes, whether it is from an input such as a microphone, from the audio portion of a presentation, or from Skype. With lots of extra features for editing, organizing, and

recording, it is easy to see why this inexpensive software is well-reviewed.

- RecordForAll (fee-based; PC only) can be used to record and edit audio files. As with the previously mentioned programs, you can add special effects or music to audio files, and Record for All produces files as MP3, WAV, or WMA.

Screencasts (video captures of what is happening on a computer screen) are an excellent way to show someone how to do just about anything. You can teach students how to conduct a science lab experiment or teach teachers how to create a product to enhance the curriculum, such as a group blog. Here are a few tools for creating screencasts:

- Jing (free; cross-platform) is a free tool for creating short (5 minutes or less) screencasts. You select a window and Jing records everything that happens in that window or area of the screen. You can also narrate the screencast if your

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Tool	Website	Platform	Cost
Audacity	http://audacity.sourceforge.net	Cross	Free
Audio Hijack Pro	www.rogueamoeba.com/audiohijackpro	Mac	\$32
RecordForAll	www.recordforall.com	XP or Vista	\$49.95 or less per unit
Jing	www.jingproject.com	Cross	Free
Camtasia Studio	www.techsmith.com/camtasia.asp	PC	\$299
ScreenFlow	www.telestream.net	Mac OS X 10.5	\$99
Adobe Digital School Collection	www.adobe.com/education/k12/adsc	PC	Licensing starts at \$149
iLife	www.apple.com/education/teachers-professors/digital-content-creation.html	Mac	\$79 for newest version, but comes installed on every new Mac
Lesson Corner	www.lessoncorner.com	Cross	Free
Lulu	www.lulu.com	Cross	Free
Super Screenshot	http://superscreenshot.com	Cross	Free
Zotero	www.zotero.org	Cross	Free
eSnips	www.esnips.com	Cross	Free
UberNote	http://ubernote.com	Cross	Free

computer has a microphone (you can pick up a good USB microphone headset at your favorite tech store for less than \$25). Jing only creates files in SWF format (Flash), and you cannot use it to edit your screencast.

- Camtasia Studio (fee-based; PC only) is a full-blown screencast program for creating professional-looking screencasts. With Camtasia, there is no time limit for the length of the screencast. It gives you lots of options for editing, enhancing, and sharing your creations. While currently only available for PCs, a Mac version is in the works.
- ScreenFlow (fee-based; Mac OS X 10.5) records everything on your screen, and you can use it to capture both video and presentations. In addition, you can add effects to your mouse clicks during the recording. Editing the audio and video is also possible with the software. The end result is a QuickTime movie.

SUITES OF CONTENT CREATION PRODUCTS

- Adobe Digital School Collection (fee-based; PC only) includes software for photo, audio, and video editing, as well as web publishing. The suite contains Photoshop Elements 7 to edit and enhance photos, Premiere Elements 7 to create and edit videos, Acrobat 9 Pro to create and edit electronic documents that are more easily shared via the web, Soundbooth CS4 to create and edit audio files, and Contribute CS4 to allow students to post to a designated website. A DVD with lesson plans and sample projects is included.
- iLife (fee-based; Mac only) is a suite of programs from Apple to aid in content creation. It contains iPhoto for editing and organizing digital photos,

iMovie for creating movies, GarageBand for recording and editing studio for audio files, iDVD for creating DVDs, and iWeb for creating websites, blogs, and wikis. Apple offers online tutorials and personal training as well as a social network to share ideas and collaborate with other teachers. Additionally, Apple has numerous K–12 curriculum collections for different age groups, such as early learning and upper elementary.

HONORABLE MENTIONS

- Lesson Corner (free; cross-platform) enables you to create work sheets quickly and easily and to come up with creative ideas for lesson plans. In the puzzle creator, you can create crossword, word search, and word scramble puzzles using an available list, or you can create your own. On the math work sheet site, you can access work sheets on multiplication, telling time, and a variety of other math tasks with which students may need more practice.
- Lulu (free; cross-platform) is a web-based self-publishing service. You can use it to create books, brochures, and posters, as well as digital content with graphics, sound, and video. Students might also use the service to help create reports or projects for class. There is a store associated with Lulu to sell or distribute your content.
- Super Screenshot (free; cross-platform) produces a screenshot for any website. More than just a “print screen” feature, this tool allows you to choose the size and image file format (JPEG or PNG) of the entire page or just the top portion of the screen. And for fun, you can see the last 100 screenshots that were requested.

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- Zotero (free; cross-platform) is a Firefox add-on to help manage online references. When you click on the Zotero icon, the program "senses" the bibliographic information on the website and puts it in your list of sources in the citation format you choose. Note that your citations are only accessible from the computer on which they were saved, although an upcoming version of Zotero will resolve this limitation.

SHARING THE CONTENT YOU CREATE

- eSnips (free; cross-platform) is a social content sharing site capable of distributing any type of media. Created to enable people with shared hobbies and interests to connect with each other, eSnips allows you to share everything in one place. With 5 gigabytes of space, you can create your own filing system with folders to organize your photos, music, videos, documents from the web, or just about anything. You can also control what is private and what is public for each individual folder.
- UberNote (free; cross-platform) is a free web application to help organize and provide access to all your class notes, browser bookmarks, documents, to-do lists, and random brilliant ideas. UberNote is easy to use because you can upload directly to the tool via email or AOL Instant Messenger. It truly is a one-stop place to save all kinds of information that you can then access from any computer. And this is private—only you have access to your notes, unless you allow other UberNote users to see and change your notes.

CONCLUSION

Content creation (and sharing) is king in today's Web 2.0 environment. The quality and variety of these types of tools, free and fee-based, continue to improve. In this brief

article, we chose to narrow our selections to ones we were familiar with and were happy using in a K–12 or related setting. Still, it is important to remember that not all of these tools will work in every school and learning environment or on every computer platform. It is a good idea to develop a policy (or to ask your administrators) regarding which tools you will and will not be able to use, as many schools have regulations and/or firewalls preventing access from school computers for certain websites and applications. Also keep in mind that some of your students may not have computer or internet access outside of school.

Finally, although we chose not to include blogs and wikis in this article, you may be interested in a chapter by Robert Lackie and John LeMasney from *Google Scholar and More: New Google Applications and Tools for Libraries and Library Users* and the WikiMatrix.org website, which provide a matrix comparing various blogging and wiki platforms, respectively. Other educational and social award-winning tools can be found by visiting the annual Web 2.0 Awards site provided by internet marketing and search engine optimization company SEOMoz.org. *TIME* magazine also provides an interesting annual award-winning list ("50 Best Websites 2008"). As with SEOMoz, many are content creation and sharing tools.

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